DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 412 410 CE 074 981

AUTHOR Dighe, Anita
TITLE Women and Literacy in India: A Study in a Re-settlement Colony in Delhi. Education for Development Occasional Papers Series 1, Number 2.
INSTITUTION Education for Development, Reading (England).
ISBN ISBN-1-870447-15-8
PUB DATE 1995-08-00
NOTE 29p.
AVAILABLE FROM Education for Development, Building 33, University of Reading, London Road, Reading RG1 5AQ, England, United Kingdom.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Continuing Education; Developing Nations; Educational Attainment; *Educational Attitudes; Foreign Countries; *Illiteracy; Land Settlement; Learning Processes; *Literacy Education; Outcomes of Education; Participation; *Refugees; Teaching Methods; Urban Areas; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *India

ABSTRACT

A group of 100 randomly selected women living in the resettlement colony of Ambedkernager in South Delhi, India, who had participated in colony's Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) were interviewed regarding their participation in the TLC. Of the 100 women, 34 had attended school earlier. Four of the 34 women were still attending school. Most respondents were motivated to join the TLC by young literacy volunteers living in their neighborhoods. Although most women joined the TLC on their own initiative, most had husbands, parents, or children who supported their participation in the campaign. Most respondents had positive opinions about the literacy volunteers; however, not all of them liked attending literacy classes. Although all the respondents had completed the three TLC primers, only 16% were able to reach the National Literacy Mission norm when tested. By and large, the respondents did not use their newly acquired reading, writing, and numeracy skills in their everyday lives. When asked whether literacy had changed their personal and family lives, many respondents did not initially answer positively. When probed, however, they acknowledged some changes in their lives after acquiring literacy skills. (Contains 28 references.) (MN)

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EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

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WOMEN AND LITERACY IN INDIA: a study in a re-settlement colony in Delhi

Dr Anita Dighe
National Institute of Adult Education, Delhi

August 1995

EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT
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ISBN 1 870447 15 8

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ISBN 1 870447 15 8

Education for Development 1995

Abbreviations used in the text

NGO Non-Governmental Organisation
NLM National Literacy Mission, Government of India
TLC Total Literacy Campaigns

Introduction

Women's literacy has remained an unresearched area not only within India but also internationally. In recent years, the World Bank has been promoting basic education of women and girls on the basis of research evidence which appears to show that women's education is negatively correlated with fertility rates and with infant and maternal mortality. According to Lalage Bown (1990), many of the so-called proofs of a relationship between women's education and various socio-economic changes are based on schooling statistics rather than adult literacy data, and while such statistics are useful for promoting the education of girls, the fact remains that very little is known about the outcomes of literacy for adult women. This is because researchers have paid so little attention to women's literacy that it has remained "an utterly under-researched area" (Bown 1990). The present study was undertaken in order to promote the process of understanding the impact of literacy on women's lives in India.

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Women's Literacy - an area of neglect

Despite policy initiatives, progress with regard to the education of women and girls in India has been tardy. Problems of access, quality, quantity and relevance have exacerbated over the years. This has happened for several reasons. For one, women's illiteracy has never received the priority attention it deserves. this was reflected in the earlier literacy programmes that were *ad hoc*, short-term and limited in scope. It was with the launching of the National Adult Education Programme in 1979 that the gravity of the problem of illiteracy among women was acknowledged. But despite this, no specific programmatic interventions were either planned or implemented.

With the launching of the National Policy on Education (1986) and its subsequent revision in 1992, the problem of gender inequalities in education has received concerted attention for the first time. Thus the policy document has unequivocally stated that education should play "a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women".

The recognition of inequalities in education led to the formulation of the *Mahila Samakhya* programme which is now in operation in four states of the country. *Mahila Samakhya* is an innovative approach aimed at raising women's consciousness about the deprivation suffered by them in the family and society at large. Experience has shown that as women have been empowered at the personal and collective levels, they have experienced the need to become literate.

In contrast, the Total Literacy Campaigns have now become operational in more than 250 districts in the country. While the *Mahila Samakhya* approach is slow, process-orientated and allows women to seek literacy as and when they feel the need for it, the TLC strategy deals exclusively with imparting skills of reading, writing and numeracy to the non-literates, most of whom are women. By and large, TLCs have paid little attention to specific issues relating to women's literacy. Since the TLCs are implemented in a campaign mode, gender issues are not consciously built either into the content of the training, or into the literacy primers or post-literacy materials.

It was in order to focus attention on gender issues in TLCs that *SAMATA* - a *gyan vigyan jatha* for women, literacy and peace - was organised during early 1993. For one month, eight cultural troupes consisting of young men and women travelled through the countryside performing *nukkad nataks*, singing songs and generally raising people's awareness on gender issues. While *SAMATA* was short-lived and its gains were limited, it showed one direction for furthering the cause of women's literacy by making an attempt to link with the larger women's movement in the country.

What does Research say?

The overall neglect of women's literacy has resulted in inadequate academic attention being paid to gender issues in adult education. According to Dighe and Patel (1992), researchers in adult education have neither paid adequate attention to examining gender issues in adult education, nor have they undertaken systematic research on adult education for women. On the basis of a quick review of research in adult education, Patel (1994) makes the following general observations about the status of adult education research on women.

(1) In the absence of a thorough analysis of Ph. D. dissertations of Indian universities, it is difficult to assess the extent to which gender issues have been dealt with in the dissertations. However, a cursory examination of the titles reveals that the very few of them dealt with women as the focus of their research inquiry. Of the 88 evaluation studies conducted by various research institutes and agencies, only two of them focused specifically on women. Overall, even researchers working in the field of women's education and women's studies have not paid any serious attention to adult education for women.

(2) With the increasing involvement of women's activist groups in using education as a tool for empowering women, questions are being raised about the type of adult education programmes that would bring this about. Some of the women's groups have used participatory research methodologies very effectively in their work with poor women. While the work of these groups has raised pertinent questions relating to women's literacy, the overall documentation is still weak. Also, such research is in a nascent form.

Gender issues in Literacy - a conceptual framework

One of the issues that has concerned feminist scholars and activists in recent years has related to the question of the kind of education that would be most relevant to the needs of poor women. It has now been recognised that literacy for poor women is not merely the acquisition of skills of reading, writing and numeracy alone. As a matter of fact, there has been considerable criticism of the traditional literacy programmes that have focused merely on imparting the "3 Rs" to women. Thus, it has been recognised that literacy for poor women must become a means for acquiring knowledge and skills whereby women can understand and analyse unequal gender relations and the structure of their poverty and exploitation in society, so that they can collectively challenge and change the existing social reality (Anand 1982; Bhasin 1984 and 1985; Dighe 1989; Ramdas 1990; Stromquist 1992). In other words, literacy has to be perceived as a tool for empowering women in the wider struggle against inequality and injustice in society.

A moot question to be asked is, to what extent have the existing literacy programmes empowered women. In order to answer this question, there has to be conceptual clarity regarding the term "empowerment". There has been

an attempt in recent years to define empowerment in the context of women's education (Lind 1992; Stromquist 1993; Batliwala 1993). Besides a unanimity about the multi-faceted nature of the concept, there is also a realisation that the term empowerment is about "power" and about changing the equations of power between men and women at all levels. Essentially, empowerment is an on-going process and indicates a movement from a state of powerlessness to one that enables women to take greater control over their lives and resources.

While the debate on definitions of empowerment is still inconclusive, some attempts have now been initiated to define some broad indicators of empowerment for purposes of evaluation. Two recent documents - a seminar report of UNESCO Institute of Education (1994) as well as a draft report brought out by the Coordination Unit for the Beijing Conference based in New Delhi, show that a beginning has been made in this direction. Thus, one of the indicators of empowerment is the positive self-image and sense of self-confidence that is experienced by those who participate in the educational programme. Some of the other indicators include increased articulation levels on issues affecting women specifically, as well as the community at large. Another important indicator relates to the changes in the roles and responsibilities in the family and in the community. Thus for example, it would be pertinent to find out if there is an increase in the bargaining/negotiating power of the women in the family and the community. Some of these indicators would have to be taken note of in ascertaining what changes have taken place in women as they participated in the literacy campaign.

The international as well as the national experience seems to indicate that women participate in large numbers in the literacy campaigns/programmes. According to Lind (1992), in many African countries (eg. Botswana, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Zambia) women represented between 70 to 90 per cent of the enrolled literacy learners. In India, evaluation studies on government-sponsored literacy/adult education programmes undertaken by various social science research organisations in the country have shown that there has been a phenomenal increase in women's participation in adult education programmes over the years (National Literacy Mission 1988). And yet no serious attempt has been made to examine the issue of women's participation in the adult education programmes in a systematic and concerted manner. According to Dighe and Patel (1993), sporadic references are made to gender-specific factors such as housework, childcare, unfavourable social environment, discriminatory cultural attitudes, distance to adult/nonformal education classes etc. which hinder women's/girls' participation. While these reasons are important, an analysis that only confines itself to identifying the reasons in a typically segmented and disconnected manner through quantitative research gives a very limited understanding of the forces behind the constraining factors.

Stromquist (1992) has underscored the importance of understanding the powerful contribution made by the feminist theory and analysis in order to grasp the exact nature of the phenomenon of women's illiteracy. Thus, feminist research has made significant contributions to the understanding of the conditions of women in society and also to the condition of women in education. According to her, the patriarchal ideology has two mutually supportive components, the sexual division of labour and control over women's sexuality, that operate under the principle of complementarity. This principle has assigned women the roles of mother and wives and assumed that these tasks are natural and thus immutable attributes of women. When women have mentioned "lack of time," it is really a result of the sexual division of labour that imposes upon them numerous domestic duties. Excuse of "distance from the literacy centre or school" is also a manifestation of sexuality control, as husbands/parents seek closer places that would enable them to have better supervision of women's/daughter's sexual behaviour and safety. There are several advantages in relying upon theory. By using theory, factors for women's/girl's participation/non-participation are not just a string of events but become systematically linked for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of women's participation in educational programmes.

If women participate in large numbers in the literacy programmes, it is important to ascertain what are their expectations in joining literacy classes. Lind (1992) found that in several surveys undertaken in various Third World countries, the most common response was very general - often implying only a strong wish to learn reading, writing and calculation. Other reasons found by Riria (1983) and other researchers relate to:

(i) The desire to help children to study. Studies from Kenya and Mozambique have shown that for many women, one of the constraints of illiteracy was a sense of inadequacy in mothering. The main motivation for wanting to study in these cases was to be able to help their children with studies.

(ii) More self-reliance and control over personal life. Again, experience from some African countries has shown that some women wish to become literate in order to exercise more control over their daily lives in the home and community.

(iii) The wish to be actors in society in the same way as men. Apparently, literacy classes provide an opportunity for women to come out of their homes and to interact with one another and discuss common problems.

These reasons and several others highlight women's motivation for becoming literate in the African context. While it is possible that the same set of reasons would also be valid in the Indian context, given a different socio-economic and political context, it would be worthwhile finding out what are women's expectations and for what reasons they would like to become literate.

Another area in which there is little research evidence relates to the level of literacy attainment by women. According to Lind (1992), her experience of the literacy programmes in many African countries showed that the drop-out rate was higher and attendance was more irregular among women than men. Studies of literacy programmes in Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mozambique (Johnston 1984; Lind 1988) showed that it took longer for female than for male learners to become functionally literate owing to a number of factors. The question of the time taken by female learners to become literate becomes particularly relevant in India in the context of the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) which are time-bound and target-orientated.

Besides the level of literacy reached by women, it would be important to find out whether the newly acquired skills are being used by them in their daily life, and if so, to what extent. Research on the effects of the national literacy programmes in Kenya (Carron et al 1988) showed that neo-literate women tended to use their literacy skills less frequently than men. The difference was particularly strong in the case of newspaper reading. On the other hand, it was found that in the case of calculations, the differences between the sexes were less pronounced, probably as a consequence of the involvement of all segments of Kenyan society in the market economy. In the Indian context, it would be important to ascertain the level of literacy reached by women who participate in TLCs as well as to find out the extent to which the skills are put to functional use by them in their day-to-day life.

What kinds of efforts are needed to sustain literacy for women? The area of post-literacy for women is neither conceptualised adequately nor researched. Experience, however, is showing that there is no easy road to sustain basic literacy skills among women. Unlike men, in the case of women the use of their recently acquired skills and literacy becomes severely limited owing to their social environment and their lack of interaction with the outside world. Women are therefore more prone to relapse into illiteracy than men.

Emphasis in post-literacy has tended to be on self-learning. Though self-learning is important, a moot question to be asked in the case of women is, are the literacy skills acquired by them adequate to ensure that self-learning will take place. Continuous efforts involving both the literacy volunteers and the learners would probably be necessary in order to ensure that women master basic literacy skills. A supporting environment and collective mode of learning would play an important role in the post-literacy phase.

Dighe and Patel (1992) aver that since the problem of illiteracy is inextricably linked to the problem of poverty, a more holistic and long-term strategy for continuing education would have to be planned if gender equity in literacy is to be brought in the long run. In the context of low levels of economic development and competitive labour markets, the acquisition of literacy skills *per se* would not improve women's participation in the economy or ensure their access to services and resources. Poor women who struggle for survival would need knowledge and skills to improve their economic conditions in order to address their immediate needs for family survival. In the long term, post literacy strategies for women would have to go beyond sustaining literacy and provide vocational skills (Rogers 1994b) and also enable them to get access to the formal educational system. Within this overall framework, it would be worthwhile finding out women's perceptions and desire for furthering their education beyond the basic literacy phase.

A question of great interest and relevance to literacy practitioners, policy makers, planners and researchers elates to the impact of literacy on women's lives. As noted above, in recent years the World Bank has been making a case for investing in basic education of girls and women. On the basis of research evidence from developing countries, Lockhead and Verspoor (1990) in their book *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries: a review of policy options*, (an important document which was prepared for the Jomtien meeting), highlighted how a mother's level of schooling was highly correlated with infant and child mortality.

By 1992, a case was being made for investing in the basic education of girls on account of the following five reasons (Summers 1992) -
(1) educating women reduces child mortality
(2) educating women reduces fertility
(3) educating women reduces maternal mortality
(4) educating women prevents the spread of AIDS
(5) educating women has important environmental benefits.
Public investment in women's education was thus increasingly justified on the grounds that there was substantial evidence from a wide range of countries that increased female education was linked to improved health, lower fertility and other benefits, and that investment in female education had a high social rate of return.

Researchers, however, have differed in their interpretation of these associations. Thus, it has been suggested that the association with illiteracy is indirect and that there are other factors that are responsible. For example, it has been suggested that lower fertility in countries with high literacy rates is not so much a consequence of literacy as such as it is of the wider availability of schooling and hence the tendency for girls to marry later (UNESCO 1993). In any case, as pointed out by Bown (1990), most research cited internationally as proofs of a connection between women's education and such phenomena as lower infant mortality rates and small family size are actually based on school statistics. She therefore undertook a study on this almost unresearched subject of the impact of adult women's literacy by studying the outcomes of 43 project case studies and one country case study (Nepal) funded by Action Aid and ODA. On the basis of the analysis of the case studies, she found that certain social, economic and personal changes could be noticed among those women who had become literate.

As the above review has highlighted, there is an overall paucity of research on women and literacy. It was therefore decided to carry out a research study on the basis of some of the research questions raised above. The specific objectives of the study were-

1. To ascertain the views and the perceptions of women who participated in a TLC as to why they joined the campaign, the advantages perceived, their expectations from joining etc.
2. To find out what were their perceptions regarding changes that have taken place due to their acquisition of literacy skills.
3. To ascertain the nature of the teaching-learning methods used and of their effectiveness.
4. To ascertain the level of literacy reached by women.
5. To find out their views about post-literacy and continuing education programmes for women.

Location of the research study - A Total Literacy project was taken up by Delhi Saksharta Samiti, a registered voluntary society, in 1991 in Ambedkernagar, a resettlement colony in South Delhi, with the intention of it being a pilot project for Metropolitan Delhi. The earlier experience had indicated that the response to the campaign mode in an urban milieu was poor. The experience of the Delhi Saksharta Samiti, however, seemed to indicate that despite constraints that were peculiar to a Metropolitan city such as Delhi, it was possible to mobilise support for a TLC from various quarters and to run the initial phases of the campaign successfully.

Selection of the sample - For selection of the sample, the colony Ambedkernagar was divided into four zones that were geographically representative. From each zone, five blocks were randomly selected, making a total of 20 blocks. For each selected block, a list of those women who had completed the three TLC primers was obtained from the DSS office. Five respondents from each block were randomly selected, making a total of 100 respondents.

FINDINGS

Profile of Ambedkernagar

Ambedkernagar is a resettlement colony situated in South Delhi and came into existence in 1975-76 when residents of *jhuggi* clusters of Seva Nagar, Bapu Dham and others were forcibly evicted and settled in Ambedkernagar. To-day Ambedkernagar is a densely populated area with a population of about 2 *lakhs* (200,000) (1991 Census). It consists mainly of six sectors namely Tigri, Devli, Khanpur, Madangiri, Dakshinpuri and Dakshinpuri extension. It also has three villages viz. Devli gaon, Madangir gaon and Khanpour gaon. Besides, there are four *jhuggi* clusters with Ambedkernagar. There are 159 blocks in all, with each block consisting of 400 to 800 households.

People who live in Ambedkernagar represent different regions of the country. But there is a fairly large portion of migrants from the Hindi states of U.P. and Rajasthan. Occupation-wise, while a large number of men work in government offices, in factories and in hotels or as contractors, women's work has remained mainly in domestic service or as piece-rate workers in the informal sector. Ambedkernagar is a congested area with most people living in one small room. Living conditions are abysmally poor. There is lack of proper sanitation, inadequate drainage, limited and irregular water supply, and immense pressure on basic facilities like milk supply. The condition of people

living in *jhuggis* is even worse, for in addition to above, there is the overall insecurity of residing in "unauthorised *jhuggi-jhopri* colonies." Illness is endemic as there are sick people in almost every household. It was in this resettlement colony that Delhi Saksharta Samiti launched a literacy campaign in October 1991.

Phases of the Literacy Campaign

The literacy campaign was launched in a phased manner. The first phase consisted of intense planning activities in which resource persons from different voluntary organisations collectively planned various training programmes as well as developed teaching/learning materials for the learners. The second phase was an environment building phase in which several activities were carried out concurrently. Thus, there was a one day house-to-house survey that was carried out by local volunteers in selected blocks of Ambedkernagar in to identify the illiterates as well as those who were educated. This one day survey provided a tentative estimate of the level of illiteracy, as well as becoming an important vehicle for mobilising people to participate in the literacy campaign. Alongside, "*kala jatha*" troupes went around different blocks of Ambedkernagar on the basis of a carefully prepared route map, and performed street plays and sang songs on the theme of illiteracy. The content of the plays and the songs dealt with the day to day problems faced by adults due to illiteracy. After each performance, a "*shapath patra*" was distributed, and those who were educated in the audience and interested in teaching were asked to fill them so that they could be invited to attend the training programme for volunteers.

In the third phase, which overlapped with the second phase, training was organised for 40 master trainers, with the help of resource persons who belonged to various voluntary organisations in Delhi. The master trainers were largely drawn from amongst the volunteers from the community. In the next phase, these master trainers in turn provided training to 1200 volunteers with the help of resource persons. Immediately after the training, the literacy classes were started in February 1992. There was an enrolment of approximately 10,000 learners in this initial phase of the campaign.

During the campaign, a number of public functions were organised - rallies, competitions, declamation contests, cultural programmes etc. These events served to sustain the momentum of the campaign.

By October 1992, most of the classes had finished the first phase of work. Those learners who had completed the three literacy primers were administered a test and those who scored above 70% were declared "literate". A public function was organised to honour the neo-literates.

Background of the Respondents

As mentioned earlier, 100 respondents were selected for the present study. While interviewing them, detailed information was obtained about each member of their household. This information included their sex, age and educational and occupational background etc. There were 537 members in their households. Out of these, 286 were male and 251 were female. Of these, 36.7% were below 15 years of age and 41.5% in the 16-35 age group. Of the 197 children, 103 were male and 94 were female. When one examined the break-up of the below -15 age group, it was evident that while there were more girls than boys in the below -4 age group, boys outnumbered girls from the age of 5 onwards. This is indicative of the low nutritional and health status of the girl child and the consequent high mortality rate amongst them.

Table 1: Age and Sex background (%)

	Male	Female	Total
< – 15	19.1	17.5	36.7 (197)
16 - 35	22.7	18.8	41.5 (223)
36 - 80	11.3	10.4	21.8 (117)
Total	53.3	46.7	100.0 (537)

There were more nuclear families (77%) than joint families among the respondents. There was, however, not much difference in the number of members in the nuclear and joint families, for the average number of members worked out to be 5 in the case of nuclear families and 6 in the case of joint families.

With regard to the educational background of the members, 28.8% were illiterate. Nearly 46% women (in the 7+ age group) were illiterate as compared to about 14% men. According to the 1991 census, the rate of illiteracy in the urban areas of Delhi was 31.5% among women and 17.6% men. As per the present study, the rate of illiteracy was much higher among women and somewhat lower among men than the official statistics. It also appears from the table that while there was an almost equal number of boys/men and girls/women who had studied up to class 8, there were more boys/men who had completed high school and above.

Table 2: Educational background of 7+ age group, by sex

	Illiterate	Upto Class 5	Class 6 - 8	Class 9 - 12	Above 12	Total
Male	13.7 (34)	16.5 (41)	9.7 (24)	26.2 (65)	33.2 (84)	53.28 (248)
Female	45.9 (100)	18.8 (41)	10.6 (23)	14.7 (32)	10.1 (22)	46.8) (218)
Total	28.8 (134)	17.6 (82)	10.1 (47)	20.8 (97)	22.7 (106)	100.0 (466)

In Ambedkernagar, men were engaged in a wide variety of occupations. In general terms, however, it is evident that the men were either in government service, or were working in the private sector, or were engaged in traditional occupations (such as tailors, cobblers, barbers, furniture makers etc) or were involved in some petty business (as electricians, vendors etc). Of the 32 women who went outside to work, most of them worked as domestic servants or were working in some factories. Although women contributed to the family income, it was the men who were regarded as the main wage earners in the family.

Profile of the Respondents

While a questionnaire was designed for the purpose of eliciting the views and perceptions of the women respondents, there were a large number of open-ended questions. It was envisaged that more qualitative insights would be obtained as a result. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere, and attempts were made to elicit women's views,

opinions and perceptions on various issues. In addition, more focused and in-depth interviews were conducted with 5 women respondents.

The analysis revealed that almost all the respondents had migrated from the Hindi states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. More than two-thirds of them belonged to U.P. and Rajasthan. A large percentage (39%) had moved to Ambedkernagar after marriage. Some respondents from U.P. had migrated in search of jobs. 19 respondents had been born in Ambedkernagar.

Table 3: Place of origin and reason for migration

	Marriage	Job	Birth place	Land provided	Other	Total
U. P.	14.0	11.0	6.0	5.0	4.0	40.0
Rajasthan	15.0	4.0	6.0	4.0	-	29.0
Haryana	1.0	1.0	-	2.0	2.0	6.0
M. P.	1.0	2.0	-	-	1.0	4.0
Delhi	7.0	-	7.0	2.0	3.0	19.0
Other	1.0	1.0	-	-	-	2.0
Total	39.0	19.0	19.0	13.0	13.0	100.0

Table 4 shows the age and marital status of the respondents. While there were 9 unmarried girls in the below -15 age group, there were 68 married women who were in the 25+ age group. There were three widowed women in the sample.

Table 4: Age and Marital Status of Respondents

	Married	Unmarried	Widowed	Total
< = 15	-	9.0	-	9.0
16 - 24	10.0	10.0	-	20.0
25 - 34	31.0	-	-	31.0
35 - 80	37.0	-	3.0	40.0
Total	78.0	19.0	3.0	100.0

53% of the respondents belonged to the Scheduled Castes which is indicative of the high Scheduled Caste concentration even in resettlement colonies. Information on the socio-economic background of the respondents was obtained on the basis of acquisition of certain household items and personal effects. These were given weightage and an index worked out as high, medium, and low. The socio-economic background of the respondents was as follows -

Table 5: Socio-Economic Background

Low	33%
Medium	50%
High	17%
Total	100%

Previous educational experience

Not all the respondents who had participated in the literacy campaign were illiterate initially. As is evident from the table below, about one third of the respondents had been to school earlier and had studied up to various levels in the formal system. Of the 34 respondents who had been to school earlier, only 4 were still school-going the rest could be regarded as school drop-outs. These women had dropped out of school for various reasons. Besides being poor, the fact that they were female was also responsible for their dropping out of school. Some young girls had left their studies because their mothers saw no need to educate their daughters. Others had to leave because of household work and responsibilities. Fathers who died caused their daughters to assume greater family burden. Early marriage ensured withdrawal from school for others. Almost all of them, however, were keen on continuing with their education. That was probably the reason why they had joined the literacy campaign in the first place.

Table 6: Level of Education of the Respondents

	Illiterate	Upto Class 4	Class 5	Class 6 - 8	Total
< - 15	1.0	5.0	1.0	2.0	9.0
16 - 24	9.0	2.0	6.0	3.0	20.0
25 - 34	22.0	5.0	2.0	2.0	31.0
35 +	34.0	5.0	1.0	-	40.0
Total	66.0	17.0	10.0	7.0	100.0

Awareness about the Literacy Campaign

How did the respondents come to know about the literacy campaign in Ambedkernagar? The interviews revealed that the "*kala jathas*" played a marginal role in motivating women, for a very large number had not even seen the "*kala jatha*". Of those who had, the responses to the "*kala jatha*" were lukewarm. While some said they had seen the "kala jatha" once and had liked what they had seen (without specifying what they had liked), there were some who said the "*kala jathas*" were about the importance of education, while others vaguely mentioned that "*kala jathas*" dealt with the problems faced by the illiterates. Rather than the "*kala jathas*", it was the literacy volunteers (in

most cases young boys and girls who lived in the same lane) who were largely responsible for talking to women and enthusing them to join the campaign. In other words, it was the inter-personal channels of communication that seemed to be more effective in informing and arousing women's interest in joining the literacy campaign.

Family Support for Literacy

Interestingly, most women did not need to be motivated by others to participate in the literacy campaign. While close relatives such as the husband and children (in case of married women) and parents (in case of unmarried girls), neighbours and relatives played a role, it was largely their own initiative and motivation that was responsible for their participation in the literacy campaign. However, the fact the most women who participated in the campaign had supportive husbands/parents/sons indicates that their approval was necessary for women to step out of their homes. Domestic responsibilities, on the other hand, conditioned the extent to which their participation was regular. Women often complained that they couldn't come regularly owing to domestic work or a sick child, or because of having to look after a toddler.

Interest in Literacy

Most women were of the opinion that they had no problems in participating in the literacy campaign. Said Asha, a 45-year-old women who was non-literate earlier, "I thought when everybody is studying, even I should start studying and be a part of the literacy campaign." According to Krishna Devi who was also a non-literate earlier, "I thought if I become literate, I'll be able to calculate and thus help my husband in business." Meera, a 35-year-old married woman who had studied up to class 5 earlier, joined the campaign because she wanted to improve her reading and writing skills so that she could teach others. Sita Kumari, an 11-year-old girl who is studying in class 6, joined the literacy classes because a lot of girls from her area were attending the classes and she felt she would learn more through literacy classes and thereby improve her performance in school. The reasons for joining the literacy campaign were thus varied.

The expectations were also varied. Thus, some wanted to learn just enough literacy to be able to sign their names, or read bus numbers. Others thought if they could "learn a little," it would be to their advantage. Still others felt constrained by their inability to keep accounts. Their expectations were then to acquire appropriate skills that would help them to keep proper accounts. Inability to teach their children and monitor their homework was yet another reason for some. There were, however, women who felt the need to acquire literacy skills for such private reasons as the ability to read and write letters or books. They were also of the opinion that the acquisition of literacy skills would enable them to seek employment.

A related question was the kinds of problems they had earlier faced because of illiteracy. It appeared from their responses that they felt that illiteracy had constrained their ability to deal effectively with day to day problems. These included their inability to (i) use the public transport system effectively, (ii) keep proper accounts (iii) read and write letters on their own (iv) deal with written communications in an autonomous manner (v) suffer the "ignominy" of having to put their thumb impression. As non-literates, some felt harassed in going out on their own. The acquisition of literacy skills was therefore perceived to be important in order to enable them to become independent, function autonomously and deal with everyday issues in an efficient manner. Literacy skills were also perceived to be important for seeking employment or for engaging in petty business. Some were of the opinion that as literate mothers, they would be able to teach their children.

Opinion about literacy volunteers, teaching/learning methods used

What was the opinion of the learners about their literacy volunteers? What were he teaching/learning methods that were used? What was their reaction to the literacy primers? Essentially, these sets of questions tried to ascertain the nature of volunteer/learner relationships as well as the teaching methods used.

It was apparent from the responses that a majority of the respondents had a positive opinion about the literacy volunteers. While a large number of these volunteers were seen to be enthusiastic and related well to the learners (who in any case were known to them as they often lived in the same row of houses), about one-fourth of the respondents commented that their volunteers either did not teach them for long or had been irregular in their attendance.

The traditional teaching methods have always emphasised the use of the blackboard and writing on the slate or notebooks, and an assumption that the teacher is the repository of all knowledge. In Ambedkernagar, a large number of literacy volunteers were young boys and girls who were either school-going or were school drop-outs. Despite the training received by these volunteers that had enabled them to experience the excitement and the potential of using certain non-traditional methods for teaching, the duration of the training was clearly inadequate, for most volunteers felt more comfortable in using the formal methods of teaching. The learners reported that the volunteers made then write on the slate and in the notebooks and that they themselves used the blackboard quite frequently. Even discussions on the themes of the literacy lessons were minimal: more than half the respondents reported they had had no discussions on any issue. Of those who said they did, it was around three main sets of issues - mainly subjects relating to environmental sanitation (an issue that was very "live" for the inhabitants of Ambedkernagar and about which some were quite agitated), and issues of dowry and alcoholism. But apart from some complaints relating to water, electricity and perennially choked gutters that were lodged, no collective action was taken on any of the issues that were discussed. Nor were they ever provided an opportunity to meet with and interact with women from other centres and thereby experience group cohesion and group solidarity.

Satisfaction of attending literacy classes

And yet all of them liked to go to the literacy classes to study. Their reasons were more personal and social and did not relate to the issues of pedagogy or to the teaching methods used. Thus, a large number liked to come to the literacy class because it gave them an opportunity to meet others and study collectively. Others felt that by coming to the literacy class, they were able to "kill time." But more importantly, women had a personal reason for attending literacy classes and this was their strong desire for learning.

Despite this high level of motivation, did they have any problems in coming to the literacy classes? Contrary to expectations, there were no family reasons such as husband's/mother-in-law's unwillingness or objection to the wife's/daughter-in-law's coming to the literacy class. Nor did ill health among children or social events such as marriages, deaths ceremonies etc. prevent these women from attending the literacy classes. Rather, the problems were of a personal nature. It is worth considering the reasons given by women, for these might well provide a clue as to why women drop out of literacy classes in large numbers. Thus there were women who complained about headaches and pain in the eyes. Others said they had overall "problems in understanding" as well as problems in deciphering the letters and the "matras." While some of these reasons are a comment on the poor health status of women that has a bearing on their learning abilities, the other reasons are a reflection of the poor self-image most women have and of the manner in which they have

internalised their subordination, so that they regard their learning difficulties as natural and normal.

Mass Media Exposure and Political Participation

Television ownership among the respondents was much higher (85%) than radio ownership (57%). There was also greater utilisation of TV than of radio as is apparent from the table below.

Table 7: Frequency of watching/listening to TV and Radio (%)

	Every day	Sometimes	Never
TV	60.0	37.6	2.3
Radio	36.5	42.3	21.1

In contrast, there was much less utilisation of the print medium - 18% in the case of newspapers, 5% for newsletters and 20% for books. In terms of frequency of utilisation for each of these, these were quite low.

Not all women stepped out of their homes every day. Thus, 10% of the respondents said they did not go out of the house every day. If stepping out of the house was infrequent enough, going out of Ambedkernagar was much more infrequent for only 8 of them went out every day. The rest led a circumscribed life confined to the limits of Ambedkernagar.

Alongside their restricted physical mobility or maybe because of it, most women were not affiliated to any social or political organisation or association. Not one of them was a member of any political party.

Literacy Attainment and Uses of Literacy

A literacy test was designed, based on the norms set down by the National Literacy Mission (NLM) (Directorate of Adult Education 1992). The scores obtained by the respondents were as follows -

Table 8: Literacy Scores of the Respondents

Total Scores	%
0 - 30	54
31 - 50	14
51 - 69	16
70 - 100	16
All	100

From the table above, it is clear that despite the fact that it was reported that all the respondents had completed the three TLC primers, only 16% of the respondents were able to reach the NLM norm. The score of more than half of the respondents was less than 30. It is possible that the reason for the low scores on the literacy test was due to the fact that the test came at the end of the administration of the questionnaire, by which time exhaustion may have probably set in for the respondents. A fairly large number evinced lack of interest in taking the test and seemed eager to finish it as quickly as possible.

Furthermore, the literacy classes had closed down by October 1992 and the literacy test for the present study was administered about eight months later. It is possible that owing to the passage of time and lack of sustained post-literacy interventions, a sizeable number had already relapsed into illiteracy.

An attempt was also made to ascertain the extent to which literacy skills that had been acquired were put to daily use by the respondents. Simple questions relating to the application of reading, writing and numeracy skills in their everyday life were asked. The questions varied in their level of complexity. Thus, at one end were simple questions that asked whether they could read names of TV programmes, names of shops, brand names of items purchased such as soaps, tea etc; at the other end, there were more difficult questions, whether they could read big newspaper headlines or letters that were received or children's or any other book. With regard to writing skills, the questions that were asked varied from signing their own names, writing their own addresses, to writing letters, filling money order forms, writing an application, writing a cheque. Likewise for application of numeracy skills, the questions varied from reading time and reading bus numbers to reading the ration bill, to working out addition and subtraction on paper as well as working out rates of interest. Each of the items was given weightage on the basis of the level of complexity. The analysis revealed the following -

Table 9a: Scores for application of numeracy skills

< - 6	38%
7 - 12	29%
13 - 18	33%
All	100%

Table 9b: Scores for the application of reading skills

< - 5	56%
6 - 10	8%
11 - 15	36%
All	100%

Table 9c: Scores for application of writing skills

< - 6	89%
7 - 12	10%
13 - 18	1%
All	100%

It appears from the three tables above that the respondents, by and large, did not use their reading, writing and numeracy skills in their everyday life. This appears to be so largely in the case of application of writing skills. On the whole, it is the numeracy skills that seemed to be used more frequently. It is possible that the questions that were asked of the respondents were not relevant in the case of most women (for example, why would poor women be required to read or fill in money order forms or to fill in a cheque?) But since

the NLM has set down norms that are applicable to both men and women, it became incumbent to design a literacy test on the basis of the NLM norms, as well as to ascertain from women about the extent to which they used the literacy skills that were acquired by them in their everyday life.

An attempt was made to correlate the literacy scores with the scores for application of reading, writing and numeracy skills in order to ascertain whether the level of performance of the learners affected their utilisation of these skills. For this purpose, the chi-square test was used. As is evident from the tables below, there was a strong association between each of these variables, meaning thereby that those with higher literacy scores were more likely to apply their reading, writing and numeracy skills in their everyday life as compared to those with low literacy scores. The chi-square values for reading, writing and numeracy scores were 48.80, 28.63 and 37.47 - all of which were found to be statistically significant at .01 level of significance. Likewise, the educational background of the learners also affected their performance level. Thus, those who were non-literate did not perform as well in comparison with those who were school drop-outs and school-going. The chi-square values obtained were 30.04 which were also significant at .01 level of significance.

Table 10a: Application of Reading by Total Literacy Score

	0 - 30	31 - 69	70 - 100	Total
< - 5	46	8	2	56.0
6 - 10	3	5	-	8.0
11 - 15	5	17	14	36.0
All	54.0	30.0	16.0	100.0

Chi - square value = 48.80 **
** Significant at .01 level

Table 10b: Application of Writing by Total Literacy Score

	0 - 30	31	70 - 100	Total
< - 6	54	26	9	89
7 - 12		3	7	10
13 - 15		1	-	1.0
All	54	30	16	100.0

Chi - square value = 28.63**
** Significant at .01 level

Table 10c: Application of Numeracy by Total Literacy Score

	0 - 30	31	70 - 100	Total
<= 6	34	4		38
7 - 12	14	9	6	29
13 - 18	6	17	10	33
All	54.0	30.0	16	100.0

Chi - square value = 37.47**
** Significant at .01 level

Table 11: Educational background by Total Literacy Score

	0 - 30	31	70 - 100	Total
Non-literate	47	14	5	66
School drop-outs /school going	7	16	11	34
All	54	30	16	100

Chi - square value = 30.04**
** Significant at .01 level

Outcomes of Literacy

The women learners in the present study comprised a heterogeneous group in terms of reading and writing skills. Besides their varying educational background, their overall performance levels also varied. Given this diversity, it was felt rather than ascertaining their performance only on the basis of the literacy test, it would be pertinent to find out if they had experienced any changes or "gains" as a result of their participation in the literacy classes. The relevant questions then were, "Had literacy brought about any changes in their lives?" "Were any changes perceived at the personal level, at the family level?"

Interestingly, these questions did not evoke a positive response in the case of a large number of women. But when they were probed, it was apparent that some changes were perceptible. Thus, there were those who felt "they had become knowledgeable, more understanding." There were others who had experienced more self-confidence. Said Krishna Devi, a 30-year-old married woman with 5 children, "I'm now able to manage our business even if my husband is not around. I am able to help the children with their homework." According to her, a literate woman can manage better because "she is more confident and nobody can cheat her." Asked about any changes in her relationship with her husband, she had this to say, "Men always try to assert their authority. My husband used to say earlier, "you don't know anything" but he behaves somewhat respectfully now because I talk back." Her neighbours also confirmed that after joining the literacy campaign, Krishna Devi had become more confident and outspoken. Wala Devi acknowledged that even though she attended the literacy classes for just one month, she felt she "could understand things better and could communicate better." For her a literate person was one who was more confident, Discerning, and one who could manage things on her/his own as opposed to an illiterate person who she felt was often ill-treated. Meera was a school drop-out and yet her participation in the literacy class had "made her feel good and had enabled her to articulate better." She is fond of reading books during leisure time but due to her participation in the campaign, she now feels confident that she will be able to teach others. As a school-going girl, Sita Kumari felt her participation in the campaign had improved her articulation and honed her reading and writing skills.

On the whole, however, the acquisition of literacy skills did not seem to have altered or improved women's status within the family. For the perception of a majority of them was that there were no visible changes in their relationship with their husbands, children, parents. Some of them, however, did comment that their husbands and children were encouraging and approving of their efforts.

Desire for Post-Literacy and Continuing Education

If the desire for basic literacy was strong enough, that for continuing education was no less strong. For a majority affirmed they wanted to continue with their education because of their strong interest in studying. There were those who wished they could put their literacy skills to functional use (for example, to read newspapers, write letters independently, teach children etc.), but there were others who had aspirations to seek employment and those who wanted "to be somebody in life." Of the less than one fourth of the respondents who did not wish to continue, the reasons advanced were lack of time due to household chores, preoccupation with children, lack of interest in further studies and inability to continue because of ill health, advancing age, poor eye sight etc.

Of the majority who wanted to study further, not all of them wanted to pursue their learning for any instrumental goal. About one third wanted to pursue learning as an end in itself. But an equal proportion expressed a hope and a desire to be able to find a job, including a fairly large number who specifically mentioned acquisition of a technical skill (such as tailoring). That the literacy programme had raised the aspirations of the learners was evident from such statements as "I'd like to be a doctor," "I'd like to be a madam," "I'd like to do a course," "I'd like to do business." Participation in the literacy campaign had also kindled the instinct for social service in some who said they'd like to teach others.

There was, however, inadequate articulation about the type of post-literacy and continuing education programmes the respondents wanted. While a need was expressed for tailoring (presumably due to lack of exposure to any other vocational skill women could aspire for), the fact that women were articulating such a need underscores the importance of planning for providing various types of vocational/technical programmes as part of continuing education. While respondents were of the opinion that opportunities for continuing education should be provided, they were unclear as to what kinds of programmes they would have preferences for.

One of the constituent NGOs that formed the Delhi Saksharta Samiti ran a library service for children. Under the aegis of this organisation, arrangements were made to provide library services in some parts of Ambedkernagar. Even though the books provided were for children, an attempt was made to ascertain if the women knew about the library service and if so whether they used the service. Surprisingly, only three respondents were aware of this service. The rest were either unaware, or said they had no time or else felt they still lacked adequate reading skills for independent reading. If they borrowed books from anyone, these were mainly children's books or some story books. In case of difficulty in reading' they sought the help of children in the family or their husbands or relatives or the literacy volunteers. The analysis showed that the reading habit was still not strongly inculcated among the women and that their reading skills were limited and as a result, they required guidance/supervision from others.

ANALYSIS

The findings of this study have corroborated the findings of other studies that have shown that women's motivation for literacy is very high. The fact that women participate in large numbers in the Total Literacy Campaigns can be explained by the high motivational levels for the literacy campaign. Another reason relates to the "social sanction" that is obtained for women's participation due to large-scale mobilisation that is attempted by the campaign. Women are the gainers, for the various patriarchal considerations that hinder their participation become at least temporarily inoperative as they come out of their homes and take part in the campaign with great enthusiasm. But women also come with varying expectations from the literacy campaign. As this study showed, the reasons for joining the literacy classes varied, so also their expectations.

It is worth noting, however, the importance of contextual factors that determine women's need for literacy. Living in a congested resettlement colony in a metropolitan city such as Delhi, the acquisition of literacy becomes important in order to enable them to become independent and function autonomously. Thus for example, the inability to use the public transport system efficiently or the inability to keep written accounts or write occasional letters and deal with written communications independently become the reasons for their joining the literacy classes. Considering the generally low educational attainment of their school-going children and the poor quality of education that is provided by government schools, mothers of school-going children also feel the need to become literate in order to help the children with their studies or at least monitor what is being taught in schools. With a deepening economic crisis as well as the realisation that very many types of employment are no longer accessible to the non-literates, there is also the expectation that the acquisition of literacy skills would enable them to seek employment or at least engage in petty business. In other words, the reasons given by women for joining literacy classes are conditioned by the socio-economic milieu in which they live. In order to understand what are the factors that influence a woman's decision to join a literacy class, it would be worthwhile undertaking more extensive work in varied situations - most importantly in rural areas. Such studies would be important in order to see whether the type of literacy and post-literacy programmes that are offered at least match some of the expectations for which women join literacy classes.

Beside their high level of motivation, women also generally liked to attend the literacy classes. It seems their reasons were more personal and social and were not related to issues of pedagogy or to the teaching/learning methods used. Thus a large number liked to go to the literacy classes because it gave them an opportunity to meet others and to study collectively. This social dimension of literacy has been commented upon earlier (Horsman 1988; Dighe 1992). For according to them, literacy classes provide an opportunity to large numbers of women to break the isolation which is socially structured into their lives, giving them a chance to meet other women and learn collectively rather than learn singly as individuals. Even the fact that some came to literacy classes to "kill time" is an aspect of social isolation that makes time hang heavily on the hands of some women.

But what came across unambiguously in this study was the women's strong desire for learning. This finding gives a lie to those who are of the opinion that women are not motivated to learn.

If women joined literacy classes for personal and social reasons, it was largely the personal factors that were responsible for their irregular attendance or for their discontinuance. A comment has been made earlier on the poor health status of women that has a bearing on their learning abilities. It is a fact that older women in their forties and fifties are constrained due to lack of reading glasses. But more importantly, it is the internalisation of their subordination that results in their feeling that they are useless and worthless learners - the more so because they regard their learning disabilities as natural and normal. This has implications for the organisation of literacy classes for women. For in order to overcome this attitude which epitomises the attitude of most poor women towards literacy, the learning process must enable women to be themselves, to be valued the way they are, to experience person-hood, to move from a feeling of worthlessness to a feeling of self-worth. It also indicates that the ambience of a literacy class should be such that women feel comfortable, relaxed and do not experience anxieties. Since women lack a social space they can call their own, literacy classes need to provide them that space. Experience is showing that programmes that provide women the social space to be away from their homes, to be relaxed, to talk to others, to seek help from others, enhance and sustain women's learning.

Experience to date has also shown that teaching methods play an important role in literacy participation and for sustaining motivation among women in general. Thus a superior and patronising teaching attitude discourages interest while a democratic, open and involved relationship - treating women as equals and creating an atmosphere of confidence - has been found to have a positive influence on attendance and results (Lind 1989). The experience of some of the voluntary organisations has been particularly significant in this regard. For their experience has clearly shown how the attitudes of the volunteers as well as participatory processes of learning that encourage and elicit women's participation can create the right conditions for sustaining women's participation.

While research evidence is fragmentary, Experience has shown that the process of teaching is critical in so far as women learners are concerned. Srivastava and Sharma (1990) and Patel (1991) found that besides a flexible and learner-centred approached that elicits learner participation, the use of folk songs and literacy games breaks the monotony and repetitiveness of learning and makes learning more enjoyable and literacy acquisition less daunting.

The present study showed that the literacy volunteers felt more comfortable in using the formal methods of teaching. Even discussions on the themes of the literacy primers were minimal. In other words, the main emphasis remained on imparting technical skills of reading, writing and numeracy skills to the learners. Writing tasks on the blackboard, notebooks and slates were frequently reported. While it was intended that the key word or sentence in the literacy primer would trigger a discussion and thereby gradually raise the awareness of the learners, in reality this did not happen. This was because the translation of the theme (expressed in words/sentences) into sustained dialogue requires skills that the literacy volunteers did not have. Also, because most of the literacy volunteers were school students, their youth and relative inexperience in life also militated against the use of such non-traditional methods of teaching. Any participatory, dialogical interactions between the learners and the literacy volunteers would require sustained and on-going training support of a different kind.

The importance of participatory processes of learning becomes evident when an attempt is made to ascertain the impact of literacy on women's lives. The present study showed that for those who participated, the literacy campaign did seem to bring about some changes at the personal level. Thus some reported more self-confidence, better articulation, better discerning ability, more self-respect, and increased ability to manage on one's own. On the whole, however, their participation did not seem to have altered or improved their status within the family except for a few women who felt their husbands now treated them with some respect. The gains were limited, because the teaching-learning process did not encourage experience-sharing among the women - women talking about themselves, their experience and values, their problems, their needs; women deciding collectively and taking action to ameliorate their present condition. This process of critical analysis and reflection leading to collective action is crucial if women are to be empowered at the individual and collective levels. When empowerment indicators were used to assess the impact of literacy on these women's lives, it became evident that while literacy *per se* had initiated the process of empowerment at the personal individual level, and to that extent the impetus for change was in a positive direction, this change needed to be sustained and consolidated. Furthermore, attempts would now have to be consciously made to ensure that individual empowerment leads to collective empowerment of women and *vice versa*.

A significant finding of this study relates to the level of literacy reached by women. While the level of literacy reached by these women was low by NLM norms, it is interesting to note that this finding conforms with the African experience (Lind 1992) according to which women take much longer to become functionally literate. Also women tend to use their literacy skills less frequently (Carron et al 1988). A recent study undertaken by Stromquist (1994) in Sao Paulo, Brazil, has shown the variable levels of literacy acquired by women over a three year longitudinal study. She pointed out that women do read and write in their daily lives but in small and infrequent amounts, patterns that would hardly support the development of literacy habits. This experience has also been corroborated by the present study. For women tend to use their numeracy skills more often and their writing skills less frequently.

These findings have implications in so far as literacy campaigns are concerned. Since such campaigns are time-bound and target-oriented, their preoccupation with standardised literacy attainments conceal the variable levels of literacy attained by women. According to Street (1984), literacy is not a single unified competence, nor a fixed measurable achievement. Bown (1992) suggests that there is a hierarchy of literacies, and a learner can progress in skilfulness from one level to the next. While literacy primers in varied levels might serve to assist such a purpose to some extent, it becomes crucial that in the case of women the literacy skills that are acquired are consolidated and strengthened so as to prevent their relapse into illiteracy. Maybe women need to be involved in designing their own reading and writing materials. Experience is now beginning to show that the stories told by the women can become effective learning materials, for many women find these stories interesting when they see their own struggles and experiences reflected in them. Because the language or the dialect of the women is used in the stories, the women find them easy to read. But it is not enough for women learners to accept such experience-stories uncritically. If literacy is to empower women, then clearly experience is the crucial point from which to make a beginning. But women can also learn to develop a critical attitude by questioning their experiences as well as the rationale behind them.

The variable literacy levels reached by women also have implications developing a post-literacy programme for women (Rogers 1994a). Rather than perceiving post-literacy as a phase that is distinct from the basic literacy phase, in the case of women it is necessary to consolidate their literacy skills by developing appropriate reading and writing materials, some of which could be along the lines suggested above. Also, given many women's lack of confidence in being able to read books on their own (as in a library or *jana shikshan nilayam*), it would be desirable that reading habits are gradually inculcated in, for example, 'read aloud' sessions. But more importantly, if the basic literacy phase in the TLCs focus only on developing literacy skills, it will be incumbent that in the next phase, the focus shifts to group building and group action. In other words, conscious educational interventions will have to be made to empower women. Various skills training programme, need to be organised in response to their felt need for continuing education.

As the present study has shown, the overall gains of the Indian literacy campaign were modest in terms of the literacy levels reached by women, if the National Literacy Mission norms for a literate person are used. Likewise, it was found that qualitatively modest gains were made with regard to empowerment indicators. And yet the literacy campaigns had reinforced the desire in many women to become literate and to continue with their education. Benefits from literacy in the form of increased self-esteem, autonomy and confidence, were considerable. It seems that many women find important social spaces in literacy classes. As in the study mentioned earlier (Stromquist 1994), in this study too, it was found that unintentionally literacy classes offer women an opportunity to meet with other women with similar constraints and often with similar experiences of poverty and subordination. Literacy classes provide women with a space to which they can get away from home, one in which they can talk and exchange stories about work, family and illnesses. for many women, it is probably the first time that they can see on a collective scale that their personal situation is unique.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study was undertaken on the basis of a small sample, and to that extent the findings cannot be generalised. Also, the survey was made in one re-settlement colony of Delhi and is not representative of the rural experience. And yet this study is probably one of the first attempts to pay serious attention to women's literacy in India. The study has tried to provide answers to questions such as

a) what are women's needs for becoming literate?
b) what are their expectations from literacy?
c) what are their expectations for continuing their education?
d) what is the impact of literacy on their lives?

While the study has made a modest beginning to answer some of these questions which have policy implications, it is recommended that systematic and concerted work in this direction is undertaken in future through multi-site studies in varying linguistic and socio-economic settings.

The present study attempts to supplement quantitative with qualitative data obtained through open-ended questions and in-depth interviews with a small number of respondents. More emphasis on qualitative methods may have provided more meaningful insights relating to women's literacy. In future, special attention will have to be paid to methodological issues, particularly to various qualitative approaches that will enable the researchers to get 'inside' the experience of the women and to hear and capture their voices. For a study of literacy from a gender perspective needs to portray the concrete situation of women in their families and communities, unravel their

accumulated experiences, knowledge and practices and show how these cumulative and multiple forces interact and influence women's interest in literacy and the uses they give to literacy.

Finally, the overall experience of the Indian TLCs to date has shown that women participate as learners and as literacy volunteers in large numbers. Also, it has been noted that women receive a 'social sanction' to participate in the literacy campaigns. And yet, despite this advantage of securing women's participation, there is a near total absence of gender issues in these campaigns as they are presently conceived and designed. On the other hand, some of the characteristics of the TLCs promote women's participation. Thus for example the literacy classes in most cases take place in the immediate neighbourhood of the women learners. The literacy volunteers come from the same milieu as the learners and are in most cases boys and girls known to the learners. Each literacy class sets its own hours depending upon the convenience of the learners. The classes have a low learner-teacher ratio and there is generally a good relationship between the volunteer and the learners. According to Stromquist (1994), many of these features are favourable to women's participation.

Women's participation in the literacy programmes, however, is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. In the case of poor women, their poverty and powerlessness (due to problems of class and gender) can make the acquisition of sustainable literacy skills something of an impossible dream. There is presently little awareness among policy makers and planners about how literacy needs fit into the hierarchy of survival needs these women have in their everyday lives. What needs to be understood are the kinds of expectations that women have in joining literacy classes, the types of problems they face in attending literacy classes or in literacy skills acquisition, and how they link literacy to their everyday lives. There is thus a need to raise gender issues in the pre-planning phase of the literacy campaigns and to incorporate these issues in the planning and implementation phases. The training programmes and materials prepared for these campaigns need to become gender-sensitive. Appropriate post-literacy strategies for women need to be worked out as well.

But above all else, there is presently little understanding about the importance of literacy to empower women. For in order to translate the policy directive of 'education to empower women' into practice, it is imperative that a broader vision of literacy is taken. Until such a broad vision of literacy is taken, the present attempts will only perpetuate the stereotypical literacy programmes that have domesticated women and have not brought about any changes in their status at individual, societal and political levels.

Ms Veena Nayar and Ms Vidhu Maggu assisted in data collection work for this study. Veena Nayar also provided considerable assistance in the analysis of the data. Dr Pradeep Bhargava, Fellow, NIAE, helped with the analysis of the quantitative data. I am grateful to them for their professional help.

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